

ASKING THE BEST SALES QUESTIONS

Understanding Your Customer is the Key to Sales Success.



Table of Contents

Questions are the Lifeblood of Selling2

The Big Problem: It's Not About YOU!3

The Questioning Process.....4

Have You Heard of SPIN Selling? 6

How to Build Your Own Questions..... 7

Summary Ideas.....10

Free Workshop: Mastering the Sales Conversation10

About Joe Girard.....12



Joe Girard

Sales Performance and Mindset Coach

JoeGirard.ca and ChangeGrowAchieve.com



Share this Guide:



Questions are the Lifeblood of Selling

Do you ever catch yourself wondering what to say first? Or to say next? The truth is, no matter what you're selling, if you're doing most of the talking, you're coming at it the wrong way.

It can be easier.

If you look at anyone who has a high level of success in sales, you will find they all have one thing in common...their ability to understand their customers.

They find out what's really going on, where they're struggling, and where they ultimately want to go. They learn how to then translate whatever message and offer they want to present to resonate with their customers in a meaningful way.

I listen to countless sales calls every week for the reps and teams I train. I also work on my own calls consistently and have done well over ten thousand in my career. What I hope this guide will help you do is make your calls more effortless, allow you to connect better with your customers, and allow you to maintain control of the conversations.

What I do know is that most sales calls pivot on one of two things:

1. A missed opportunity to ask the BEST question
2. Information shared at the wrong time. Either information that wasn't right, or information that was right, but not right now.

In this guide, I will give you the answers to how to tackle the first challenge and how to set yourself up for questioning success.

As a sales trainer, coach, and consultant, I'm constantly on the lookout for specific ways you can get an edge, especially when it comes to the sales conversation. These are the very tools and processes I use with my teams each day that we get amazing results with. So follow this simple guide on building questions and use it for your next sales call.

I teach these areas of process, psychology, and mindset so that you can get an edge, be more authentic, and have fun while selling.

Sales 101: Selling is not about talking. It's all about asking questions and listening.





The Big Problem: It's Not About YOU!

Are you worried about any of these?

- Your elevator pitch
- Product knowledge
- Your slide deck
- How you dress
- Your online "guru" status
- Your website
- Point of sale materials
- And everything else that screams "image" or "knowledge"

This is where most people get hung up when selling. They are so focused on what to say, how to act, and how their marketing tools work that they forget their customer is not even remotely paying attention to any of those things.

Your customer only cares about ONE thing. Their OWN problems.



Let's simplify everything for a moment and talk about the sales conversation roadmap. Your ultimate goal in any sales discussion is to uncover the real challenges, the desires, and see if you can identify a possible fit with your customer.

You can't do that by talking alone.

Real sales conversations are made up of rapport, varying levels of questions, insights, proof, and emotions.

The biggest skill you can develop is your ability to ask, clarify, understand, and reframe what you hear. You can help your customer map out their path to change as well as position yourself as an ally and a strategic partner.

Wouldn't it be great if all your potential customers saw you as an ultimate resource and contacted you first?

Special BONUS Offer: Before we continue, I want to let you know that I have this guide as one of the courses in the Sales Hero Academy along with many others. If you want to get some expert sales training, [click here](#) to find out check it out





The Questioning Process

Have you ever gone into a sales call and wondered what to say next? And then sometimes it feels like you just have to jump right into the pitch, right?

Well, your best tool will always be your ability to ask questions, listen, and dig deeper. But it takes practice.

Follow this process to asking the best questions to keep you focused on them:

1. Ask "Level One" questions. These are the questions that get the conversation started such as; *"Why are you interested in this," "How long have you been thinking about this,"* or *"What other options are you considering?"* This should get the conversation started, but you are not at the real truth yet. There is a cool psychology term called "confabulation" that explains why the first answers we get are usually the safest. This is why we need to keep digging. Keep in mind that most sales rookies will then jump right into a pitch after they ask the level one question. Resist that urge. *Note: you always want to ask your questions with genuine curiosity and not just go through your list of questions like a police interrogator!*
2. Pay attention and take notes. I cannot overstate the importance of this step. After you ask the Level One question, pause and listen to whatever it is the prospect says. They may say, *"I'm interested in this because I'm excited about..."* or *"I'm nervous about"* or *"I've been toying with the idea of..."* or *"I was thinking about making a change..."* You should have written down EXCITED, NERVOUS, TOYING, CHANGE.
3. Ask "Level Two" questions. This is where the magic happens. Whatever you have noted from step 2, now you reframe that question and ask for clarification on their answer. *"What makes you excited about...?"* or *"What are you nervous about...?"* or *"It sounds like you have moved from toying to serious. How so?"* or *"What is causing you to want to change now?"* The Level Two question is what actually uncovers how they feel and gets you closer to the truth.
4. Take more notes. I think you see the pattern, right? You only really need to find one or two key words or phrases at this stage, but you have to look.
5. Ask "Level Three" Questions. This is where the money is! When you dig to this level, two things happen. First, you actually help THEM frame the problem more effectively and they *own* it. Secondly, it ensures that when you present your insights and ideas, you will have the highest probability that it will be the right thing at the right time.

You see, when you can help the customer frame the problem for themselves, they will start to see the weight of the issues much more effectively. When you rush to sell, you may miss the mark and then it becomes you just trying to solve the problem for them.

When you rush to solve, you end up being "salesy."

Tip: Take your time....

Sometimes it can also feel like you are just going through a list of questions, so simply remember to take your time and be genuinely curious when asking.

It is totally okay to stay on one conversation for longer than expected.

If you find that you are stuck and not getting into a real conversation, that's when you should share your BIG IDEA. I cover that in my training on building insights.

Once you are engaged and asking questions, you will be in the sweet spot.

The primary goal of asking questions is not just to get answers.

The goal of asking the best questions is to help your customers cognitively reframe their thinking.



And remember that it is not just WHAT you say, but HOW you say it, and WHEN you say it.



“Seek first to understand, then to be understood.”

Stephen Covey



Have You Heard of SPIN Selling?

In the 80's, during the height of the consultative selling era, Neil Rackham wrote SPIN Selling where they analyzed the 35,000 sales calls from hundreds of reps. What they found was that successful people didn't just ask random questions. It is great method but there's so much more to it today. The research has always been helpful for me to ensure I was asking the right questions and going deep enough. SPIN stands for:

1. **S**ituation Questions: Questions which seek a specific piece of information and data gathering. Ie. *"What system are you currently using?"* or *"Why are you looking at this solution now?"*
2. **P**roblem Questions: Once you understand more about your buyer and their situation move to this second type of question. *"Has that system been difficult to use?"* or *"Are you worried that the quality you get from that old equipment?"* or *"Why has this caused you to fall behind?"*
3. **I**mplication Questions: In the smaller sales, sellers can actually be very successful asking situation and problem questions. As the sales complexity grows, so does the need for a more sophisticated question. Implication questions help the customer feel urgency, explore problems, and outline consequences. Ie. *"What will this problem do to affect your profitability?"* or *"What happens in six months if you don't solve this now?"* or *"What does this challenge do to alter your customer satisfaction levels?"* Starting to see the difference?
4. **N**eed-Payoff Questions: The most successful salespeople use this fourth type of question during their investigating stage. Essentially, this question helps your buyers tell you how they need and will use your product or service. *"How would an extra 10% in production capabilities help you?"* or *"If you freed up an extra half a day each week, what would that do for your business?"* or *"What impact would an increase of 15% in conversions mean to your yearly budget?"*

You can watch my in depth post and video on this at

<http://joegirard.ca/spin-selling/>



How to Build Your Own Questions

Before you go into a sales call, it's important that you determine what information you would like to get that will be most valuable to your discussion. If you had the BEST information from your customer, wouldn't you be in the BEST position to be able to help them?

Go through these 9 types of questions¹ and try them for yourself by filling in the example below each one.

1) Why: Why did you...decide/say that/choose between?

- Eg: *Why did you decide that now is a good time to look at adding new technology?*
- Your goal with a why question is to get trigger a thought in their mind
- Be mindful not to put them on the defensive, but instead use a tone of inquiry, collaboration, and genuine curiosity
- When you help them see their own why, you create common belief

Your example:

2) How: How...will you, do you see, do you think?

- Eg: *How do you plan on getting your teams on board with this initiative?*
- Gets people thinking about the process and reality as well as provides some clarity
- Helps them avoid potential landmines by thinking it through
- May create change in ideas & new conversation directions as they think it out
- Generates insights on their overall plan so you don't make false assumptions

Your example:

3) What: What have you been doing so far?

- Eg: *What have you tried before to manage your team's time?*
- Helps you understand their thinking and experience with the processes
- Shows the gaps between their knowledge and yours
- Opens up room and gives you permission to educate them

Your example:

¹ Note: these are adapted from Insight Selling



4) Have: Have you considered anything else?

- Eg: *Can you help me understand what other options you've explored so far?*
- You may discover they've thought of it before and you can avoid danger zone
- They may have been unaware of previous options
- It allows you to potentially find out who you are competing against
- They may ask, *"What should I have done?"* or *"What do you think?"*
- Potentially gives you room to provide additional insights as a partner

Your example:

5) What if: What will the impact be if you DID this?

- Eg: *If you had a more efficient team, what would that mean to your overall goals?*
- They will see and vocalize the impact and importance
- You want to try to tie in emotions to the discussion
- Their perception grows as they think it out
- They may have perceived too small an impact & you can show the bigger picture.
(You can then share insights and social proof)

Your example:

6) What if NOT: What if you DON'T?

- Eg: *If you just keep doing it the way you have been, how does that affect you? Scalability, customer service, ROI, etc? or "If not THIS, then what?"*
- What will happen if they don't act? (One of your major competitors is your customer choosing to do nothing)
- Gets them thinking of negative consequences
- They may work this out themselves and internalize the pain
- May need your guidance to see it deeper

Your example:



7) What's possible? What are some other results?

- Eg: *Let's say you solved this challenge and your team was rockin. What else could you do then?*
- What opportunities emerge because of this new way forward?
- Get them to see how change opens up possibilities and new options
- Helps position you as a partner in overall strategic planning

Your example:

8) How do you know? Can you show me?

- Eg: *You said that most of your team is effective with their time. How are you measuring that now and do you have any numbers we could explore? (I always use the, is it "legacy/consistent/written" model to quantify...)*
- "How do you know that..."
- Sometimes they give "facts" that *may* have been true...
- Ask for reasoning (not judging) to get clarity
- Try and understand their assumptions

Your example:

9) What's missing?

- Eg: *What do you think's missing that we might not have covered so far?*
- They often respond with "Good question!"
- Gets them to share with you their *own* insights and gives them a chance to speak a bit more
- Creates collaboration
- Great to use when you are losing them...

Your example:

Take the time to write out your questions so you are prepared for every scenario. Learn to dig deeper and wait until you have their whole story before you jump in and try to sell to them.

The best gift you can give someone is asking questions and showing your genuine interest in them.





Summary Ideas

In today's busy world, it is not often we are truly listened to. Take the time and listen to your customers and they will tell you exactly how you can help them. More importantly, they will tell you how they would like to buy from you.

By doing this, you will constantly increase your chances of getting non-competitive deals and also larger average deal sizes.

If your goal is to be sought after as a resource, rather than a nuisance, get ridiculously good at asking questions!

Remember these tips:

- Listening is the MASTER skill. Be insatiably curious & constantly seek implied needs. Use notes to find the real meaning behind the answer & dig deeper
- Ask for more details – with the tone of inquiry and collaboration
- Keep pressing so that you don't make false assumptions

The keys to questioning success:

- Avoid getting into Q & A sessions or interrogations
- Remember "Cognitive reframing" – help them see new ways to perceive ideas
- Influence their thinking, influence their actions
- Paraphrasing/story telling confirms your understanding and reduces. *"Let me make sure I have your story correct..."* (more on this in my training)
- It's not compelling unless they BUY it. *They* must make the decision, not you telling them the solution. This is the difference between an implied need and an explicit need
- Ask, listen, demonstrate understanding instead of just diagnosing
- The first of the five buying decisions is YOU. To buy you, the following three are mandatory:
 - Connect
 - Question
 - Agree upon need
- The ultimate goal is to have *them* frame the problem rather than you tell them solutions. The more powerfully they can state their challenges, the more compelling your solution. Questions unearth challenges.
- Have patience. Resist the urge to solve.

Questions are not enough, however. You must bring more to the conversation in the way of insights, energy, and stories. Get really good at creating a space where two humans can just talk to each other. And make it less "weird!"



Join the Sales Hero Academy

Questions are only part of your overall conversation roadmap when it comes to increasing your sales effectiveness.



If you want to simplify your selling and have more fun...

Join me in the Sales Hero Academy by [clicking here](#).

In the academy, we have courses, resources, tools, and an awesome community:

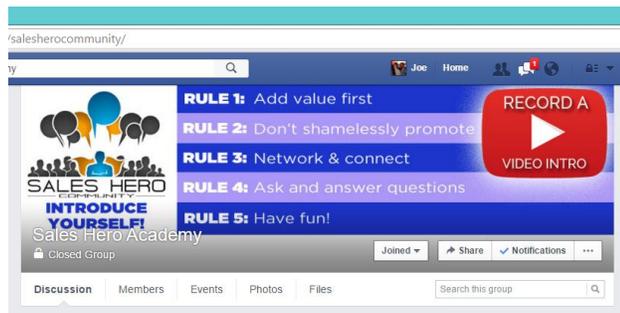
- ✓ How to sell without being all "salesy" and weird
- ✓ The psychology and influence secrets that hold back most sales discussions
- ✓ Common mistakes most people make when selling
- ✓ The new age of the buyer/seller relationship and how to get past mistrust
- ✓ Building a repeatable, best practice conversation system that you can test
- ✓ Using stories and emotions to speak to the correct part of the customer's brain
- ✓ Building a 6 figure selling system
- ✓ And more...

Come join us and take your sales game to the next level.

EXPLORE THE ACADEMY

USE THE PROMO CODE **GUIDE25 for 25% off!**

If you want to just join in the discussion, join the Sales Hero Academy Private FB Group. Awesome community helping each other sell more without being "salesy." [Click Here](#)



Thanks for checking out this free guide..

Now go ask some questions!

About Joe Girard

Hey I'm Joe. Hope you liked this guide as much as I liked making it! Questions have been a major foundation for all the work we've done in mapping sales conversations. People usually come to me to help them sell more, have fun, and to make things way less complex. I would say I combine a mix of sales expertise, education, and leadership development to enable more professionals to become what I call "Sales Heroes." I'm lucky to have clients all over the world and work with individuals, teams, and organizations to create systems, have a deeper understanding of how *their* customers make decisions, and help them build their bulletproof mindset to succeed.



I get to travel - speaking, coaching, training, and consulting with organizations large and small - from startups to multinationals. On my blog at joegirard.ca, the [Sales Hero Podcast](#), & his weekly [Whiskey Fridays](#) on Blab, I freely share insights and resources to help my audiences achieve their goals. And I've also made my high level sales training accessible through salesheroacademy.com.

No matter how much experience or education you have, you're never done learning which is why I relentlessly (maybe obsessively) educate myself in areas like sales, cognition, neuroscience, influence, leadership, systems, habits, & everything business.

I live in beautiful Victoria, British Columbia, Canada and take every moment I can to enjoy the island life. Connect with me and let's make things happen!

Joe Girard

Sales Performance, Psychology, and Mindset Coach

Change Grow Achieve

joe@changegrowachieve.com

250-661-5634

Like this guide? Share it with your colleagues and friends!

